

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.01 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 20 JUNE 2019

**COMMITTEE ROOM 1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5
CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON E14 2BG**

Members Present:

John Pulford MBE (Chair)
Councillor Rajib Ahmed
Councillor Mufeedah Bustin
Councillor James King
Councillor Abdal Ullah
Fiona Browne (Co-Optee)

Apologies:

Nafisa Adam (Co-Optee)
Mike Houston (Co-Optee)
Councillor Sufia Alam (Member)
Councillor Rabina Khan (Member)
Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman (Member)

Officers Present:

Asmat Hussain	– (Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer)
Matthew Mannion	– (Head of Democratic Services, Governance)
Janet Fasan	– (Divisional Director, Legal, Governance)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR OF STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Councillor Rajib Ahmed proposed, and Fiona Browne seconded, that John Pulford MBE be appointed Chair of the Standards (Advisory) Committee for the 2019/20 municipal year. There were no other nominations and it was:-

RESOLVED

1. That John Pulford MBE be appointed Chair of the Standards (Advisory) Committee for the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR OF STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Fiona Browne proposed, and Councillor Rajib Ahmed seconded, that Nafisa Adam be appointed Vice-Chair of the Standards (Advisory) Committee. There were no other nominations and it was:-

RESOLVED

1. That Nafisa Adam be appointed Vice-Chair of the Standards (Advisory) Committee for the 2019/20 municipal year.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

- Councillor Sufia Alam
- Councillor Rabina Khan
- Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman
- Nafisa Adam
- Mike Houston
- Elizabeth Marshall (Independent Person)
- Rachael Tiffin (Independent Person)

4. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest.

5. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

Subject to a couple of typographical amendments, it was:-

RESOLVED

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2019 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

6. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 Standards Advisory Committee New Draft Terms of Reference and Dates of Meetings 2019-20

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the report on the Committee's Terms of Reference, membership and meeting dates. He explained that it was standard practice for a Council Committee to receive a noting report at the start of the municipal year setting out its terms of reference as a reminder of its responsibilities.

However, there was additional significance this year as the proposed Terms of Reference took account of discussions at the Committee during the year and were also set out on a revised template to fit in with the ongoing general review of the Constitution. The revised Terms of Reference were to be presented to Council in July for agreement.

During discussion a slight amendment to the 'Summary Description' was proposed and Members also noted that Councillor membership may well be

reduced to 5, in line with Co-opted membership, final agreement on that point would be for Council.

Subject to the above, it was:-

RESOLVED

1. That the Standards (Advisory) Committee Terms of Reference, Membership and Dates of Meetings be noted.

6.2 Code of Conduct for Members - Complaint Monitoring and Associated Matters

Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer, introduced the report providing an update on any issues relating to the Member Code of Conduct.

She took Members through the list of recent Code of Conduct cases and Members discussed a number of issues including:

- Looking at the process for dealing with received complaints.
- Noting it was good news that most complaints were being closed before formal action was required.
- In discussing public behaviour on social media, it was agreed that it could be challenging. Members were encouraged to report issues to the Monitoring Officer and/or police as appropriate should particular issues arise. The Council's new social media policy would support Members in their online work.
- Noting the Council did take strong action where necessary in relation to online activities, for example an injunction had recently been taken out against a member of the public due to their online activities against Councillors.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

6.3 Standards Advisory Committee Annual Report to Council

Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer, introduced the report setting out the draft Standards Advisory Committee annual report to Council.

It was noted that in previous years the Independent Person had presented a report to Council but that it was now proposed that the report should come from the Committee. The Chair would be attending Council to introduce the report.

Members welcomed the report in general and the increased visibility it provided to them and their work.

There then followed a discussion on some possible amendments/updates including:

- Looking to add more detail around 'Outcomes' to balance the sections on process.
- Gifts and Hospitality – highlight the mechanisms for raising awareness.
- Setting out clearly why the Code of Conduct existed.
- Adding more information on the work of co-optees.

If Members had any further comments they were asked to notify the Monitoring Officer who would consider them with the Chair before circulating a final version to Members.

RESOLVED

1. That the updated report be presented to Council on 17 July 2019.

6.4 Dispensations Under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011

Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer, introduced the report. She explained that she had received no requests for individual dispensations from Members since the last report to the Committee. However, the general dispensations granted by the committee in relation to Council Tax, Housing and Member Allowances remained in place until May 2022.

There followed a discussion about declarations of interest where the work officers undertake to inform Members of potential conflicts of interest was welcomed. It was agreed that this remained an area where continued Member training would be useful with a particular reference to understanding the implications for having a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest.

Members were reminded that if they had any questions about a potential conflict, it was important to approach the Monitoring Officer or a senior Governance officer in advance of the meeting so that advice could be provided.

RESOLVED

1. To note the report.

6.5 Register of Gifts and Hospitality update

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the latest update report on declared offers of Gifts and Hospitality to Members. It was noted that there had only been nine declarations since the last report although it was pleasing to note all declarations had been submitted within the deadline.

The Committee discussed the report and, whilst welcoming the prompt reporting of offered gifts/hospitality, remained concerned that not all possible cases were being recorded. The Committee noted that reporting of gifts and

hospitality was important in showing the Council's decision making was open and transparent and that failing to make a declaration could leave Members open to challenge.

The Committee noted that a draft communication to Members had been prepared as a reminder and it was suggested that examples of possible gifts and hospitality of types that may not be being reported be included. Suggested examples included iftar and wedding invitations, events organised by developers and also invitations to attend charity events with an organisation where the usual cover charge would exceed £25.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

6.6 Work Plan 2019/20

The Chair of the Committee drew Members' attention to the workplan for the coming year. It was noted that a review of the Member / Officer Protocol was due at a forthcoming meeting.

RESOLVED

1. That the workplan be noted.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was none.

The meeting ended at 6.52 p.m.

Chair, John Pulford MBE
Standards Advisory Committee